



# VITALS

A Weekly Safety Newsletter For Medical Transport Professionals

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## Surprises

A study published in December in the online edition of British Medical Journal reveals that drivers who are distracted by cell phones quadruple their risk of serious crash and that hands-free phones are no safer than handheld. The study group consisted of 456 drivers who crashed, were hospitalized and owned or used cell phones.



The drivers were interviewed and their phone records scrutinized to determine use immediately before the crash and during other trips at about the same time of day 24, 72 and 168 hours before the crash. The goal was to compare crash risk for a given driver at the same time of day with the only variable of whether or not a cell phone was used.

The surprise is that cell phone use 10 minutes prior to the crash was linked to a quadruple risk that the crash would occur. Cell phone use 5 minutes prior to a crash was also predictive. The relationship between cell phone use and crash risk occurred independent of driver age, gender, or use of a hands-free phone.

We all know that back injuries are a big deal. In 2006, back injuries accounted for 22% of all work-related injuries. The ability to lift properly is assessed in some employee selection processes. Good lifting techniques are encouraged. We buy bariatric cots, mechanized stair chairs and lateral transfer aids. We even take the time to write up lift assist policies. Is there a chance that we could prevent back injuries by selecting footwear that incorporates anti-fatigue technology?

I was surprised by a question that was asked in a recent National Safety Council publication. Namely, "What role can protective footwear play in minimizing the potential occurrence of back or other serious injuries?" Personnel work long hours on a variety of hard, unforgiving surfaces. If their feet are inadequately supported, their bodies must expend more energy to compensate, the muscles get tired, and they become exhausted. A tired body is a clumsy, inefficient body incapable of supporting the maximally effective, and subsequently safest, geometry of contraction. Think about the repetition of movement and the forces our personnel must exert to move clients. Some of the things to look for in footwear are "standing tolerance", shock absorption and energy return, which provide better cushioning and support. Consider other risks such as slips, falls, and falling objects. Think of footwear as another form of personal protective equipment.

## Poster Pointers

Get the Big Picture!

Every time you move your vehicle, you generate forces that are capable of killing or hurting somebody and causing property damage. You know that as your speed increases, your ability to do damage increases. There are times when travelling at 10 mph is too fast for the conditions around you. Even at 10 mph you can generate killing forces and may not leave yourself enough time to redirect them away from potential victims. You cannot think of decreasing response times, transport times or transfer times without remembering that you are also decreasing the time available for you to avoid a tragedy. **IMPROPER FASTER MEANS DISASTER.**

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